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ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-first session
FIRST COMMITTEE

ALLOCATION OF AGENDA ITEMS TO THE FIRST COMMITTEE

Letter dated 20 September 1996 from the President of the General Assembly to the Chairman of the First Committee

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the decisions taken by the fifty-first session of the General Assembly at its 3rd plenary meeting pertaining to the allocation of items to the First Committee.

I wish to draw your attention to the recommendations on the organization of the session contained in section II of the report of the General Committee (A/51/250). Those recommendations were approved by the General Assembly, also at its 3rd plenary meeting.

May I also draw your attention to paragraph 38 of section IV and to the relevant part of paragraph 44 of section V of the report concerning the agendas of the Main Committees.

I earnestly request your cooperation in these matters.

(Signed) RAZALI Ismail

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ANNEX

Allocation of items to the First Committee

1. Prohibition of the development and manufacture of new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons: report of the Conference on Disarmament (item 60).

2. Reduction of military budgets (item 61):

   (a) Reduction of military budgets;

   (b) Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures.

3. Question of Antarctica (item 62).

4. The role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament (item 63).

5. The role of science and technology in the context of international security, disarmament and other related fields (item 64).

6. Amendment of the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water (item 65).

7. Implementation of the comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty (item 66).

8. Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East (item 67).

9. Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South Asia (item 68).

10. Conclusion of effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons (item 69).

11. Prevention of an arms race in outer space (item 70).

12. General and complete disarmament (item 71):

    [The General Assembly decided that the relevant paragraphs of the annual report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (A/51/307), which is to be considered directly in plenary meeting under item 14, should be drawn to the attention of the First Committee in connection with its consideration of item 71.]

    (a) Notification of nuclear tests;

    (b) Transparency in armaments;

(c) Prohibition of the dumping of radioactive wastes;

(d) Convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament: report of the Preparatory Committee for the Fourth Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament;

(e) Relationship between disarmament and development;

(f) Measures to curb the illicit transfer and use of conventional arms;

(g) Regional disarmament;

(h) Conventional arms control at the regional and subregional levels;

(i) Nuclear disarmament;

(j) Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and of vehicles for their delivery in all its aspects;

(k) Advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons;

13. Review and implementation of the Concluding Document of the Twelfth Special Session of the General Assembly (item 72):

(a) United Nations Disarmament Information Programme;

(b) United Nations disarmament fellowship, training and advisory services;

(c) Regional confidence-building measures;

(d) United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific and United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean;

(e) Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons.

14. Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session (item 73):

(a) Report of the Disarmament Commission;

(b) Report of the Conference on Disarmament;

(c) Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters;

(d) United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research;

(e) Confidence-building measures.

15. The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East (item 74).

16. Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (item 75).

17. Strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region (item 76).

18. Implementation of the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace (item 77).

19. Consolidation of the regime established by the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco) (item 78).

20. African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (item 79).

21. Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (item 80).

22. Review of the implementation of the Declaration on the Strengthening of International Security (item 81).

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FIRST COMMITTEE

LETTER DATED 6 SEPTEMBER 1996 FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE

Judging from the numerous examples that have been brought to the attention of the Committee on Conferences, it would appear that many intergovernmental bodies are under the impression that conference-servicing resources are abundant if not unlimited, to draw a parallel with natural resources. In fact, the demand for services continues to grow even as the Organization endeavours to cut back in response to the increasingly severe financial constraints it is experiencing.

Conference-servicing resources are the fuel that keep the Organization's parliamentary machinery running smoothly. However, there is a price to pay for these services. At Headquarters, the notional cost of a single page of documentation in the six official languages is $916, of which $602 stems from translation; the notional cost of one meeting is $4,553, of which $4,194 stems from interpretation. Several years ago, the Committee on Conferences set a benchmark figure of 80 per cent for utilization of allocated conference resources. In 1995, overall utilization at Headquarters, Geneva and Vienna was down to 76 per cent, owing to late starting and early ending of meetings and sessions and repeated cancellation of meetings. Here is another eye-opening figure: if the start of every meeting in New York during a calendar year were delayed 10 minutes, the loss in unutilized conference-servicing resources would amount to around $875,000.

Fortunately, there are common-sense solutions to conserve resources. As a first step, bodies could review their needs with a view to rationalizing requests for services. As for tactics to save time, experience shows that the Chairman's presence in the conference room sets an example for other delegates to arrive punctually; full use of meeting time could be ensured if meetings were convened only when an adequate number of speakers are inscribed on the list and if several items were placed on the agenda; and sessions could possibly be shortened if a time limit for speakers were set. During the planning stage, arrangements could be made to dovetail brief sessional meetings with those of a

body's regional groups or other bodies meeting on an "as available" basis; and if Conference Services is informed at least a day in advance of a cancellation, the resources thus released can be "recycled" to other groups.

But the conference room is not the only front on which the campaign for improved utilization must be waged. There are also mountains of documentation to be attacked and reduced. Here again, several action-oriented manoeuvres could be carried out: bodies could review their recurrent documentation and eliminate what they deem to be unnecessary; some reports could be considered on a biennial or triennial basis; agenda items could be merged and reports consolidated accordingly; bodies could request oral reports rather than written ones and, more important still, they could exercise restraint in making proposals containing requests for new reports.

Clearly, intergovernmental bodies are responsible for ensuring rational utilization of conference-servicing resources. The key to the success of this operation to conserve limited resources is the will to redouble efforts so as to reverse a critical situation. I trust we can count on your cooperation in this common cause.

(Signed) El Hassane ZAHID
Chairman
Committee on Conferences